

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 DHA-02 /029 W
-----064969 151025Z /13
R 150805Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2429

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, RP, US
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO NURSES' CONVICTION

REF: MANILA 9976 (1976), MANILA 12217 (1976)

1. PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTION TO NEWS OF CONVICTION OF NURSES
NARCISO AND PEREZ HAS BEEN PREDICTABLY ADVERSE AND WIDESPREAD.

2. LOCAL PRESS, WHICH HAS BEEN PROVIDING AMPLE COVERAGE OF
NURSES CASE SINCE BEGINNING, CARRIED NEWS OF CONVICTION AND
FOLLOW-UP STORIES (WHICH REACHED MANILA TOO LATE FOR COMMENTARIES
ON JULY 14) IN LARGE FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES JULY 14 AND 15.
COMMENTARY JULY 15 WAS VARIED, WITH MOST STRIDENT TONE TAKEN
BY DAILY EXPRESS EDITORIAL ENTITLED "CLEAR CASE OF US BAIS,"
WHICH NOTED THAT CONVICTION "SHOWS THE YAWNING CHASM BETWEEN
PREACHING AND PRACTICE IN THE UNITED STATES, THE
SO-CALLED BASTION OF DEMOCRACY." EDIT FURTHER NOTED THAT CASE
AGAINST NARCISO AND PEREZ CIRCUMSTANTIAL, AND HINTED THAT IN TIME
OF WORSENING UNEMPLOYMENT, US MAY BE FLASHING CLEAR SIGNAL TO
PROSPECTIVE IMMIGRANTS. CONTRASTED HARSH VERDICT WITH "DEVIL-
MAY-CARE ATTITUDE" TOWARD OFFENSES COMMITTED BY SERVICEMEN AT
BASES HERE. CONCLUDES, "PERHAPS IT IS TIME TO REASSESS, OR
RE-DEFINE EVEN, WHAT DEMOCRACY MEANS, WHAT FRIENDSHIP IS,
AND WHAT IS FAIR PLAY AND WHAT IS NOT."

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3. TIMES JOURNAL MEANWHILE, THOUGH "SHOCKED" AT THE VERDICT,
CAUTIONED AGAINST OVERREACTION (SUCH AS DEMONSTRATIONS) AND CONCLUDED
THAT "THE POSSIBILITY OF REVERSING THE VERDICT THROUGH AN APPEAL
TO THE HIGHER COURTS REMAINS STRONG." EDITORIAL CITED NEED NOW
"MORE THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME," TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE "CAMPAIGN
FOR JUSTICE" TO ASSIST THE NURSES MORALLY AND MATERIALLY IN THEIR

DEFENSE.

4. INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT MODERATE BULLETIN TODAY AND ITS
COMUNISTS CHOSE TO HOLD OFF COMMENTING ON CASE.

5. ACERBIC LEADING COLUMNIST TEODORO VALENCIA CHIMED IN THAT
VERDICT DID NOT SURPRISE HIM. NURSES "WERE CONVICTED LONG
BEFORE THEY WERE EVEN CHARGED." CALLED VERDICT A "COWBOY MOD
DECISION." TRAGICALLY, HE SAID, AMERICANS DON'T WANT TO SUBMIT
TO PHILIPPINE COURTS BECAUSE AFRAID OF SIMILAR DECISIONS.

6. PRESS REPORTS OF PUBLIC REACTION INCLUDE PRESIDENT MARCOS'
BROTHER PACIFICO, WHO HEADS HEDICARE AND "CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE"
FUND RAISING MOVEMENT. HE TOLD REPORTERS HE WAS DISAPPOINTED.
HE CALLED VERDICT "AMERICA'S GREATEST TRAVESTY OF HUMAN RIGHTS."
TO DEPRIVE A PERSON OF HIS RIGHT TO BE FREE AND EVEN HIS LIFE DOES
NOT SIT WELL WITH THE BIG PRONOUNCEMENT OF PRES. CARTER ON
HUMAN RIGHTS."

7. PRESIDENT OF PHILIPPINE NURSES ASSOCIATION EXPRESSED SHOCK OVER
JURY'S DECISION, BUT SAID SHE BELIEVED JUSTICE WOULD ULTIMATELY
PREVAIL. PNA ANNOUNCED MEETING THIS WEEK TO DETERMINE WHAT ACTION
TO TAKE.

8. PRESIDENT OF INTEGRATED BAR OF PHILIPPINES MARCELO FERNAN SAID
IT "LAMENTABLE THAT CONVICTION BASED ON SCANTY CIRCUMSTANTIAL
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EVIDENCE WITHOUT CLEAR PROOF OF MOTIVE." FERNAN EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE
APPELLATE COURTS WILL REVERSE CONVICTION.

9. COMMENT. THERE HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY LITTLE EFFORT ON THE PART
OF THE MEDIA TO ELICIT COMMENT FROM THE EMBASSY. IF QUERIED
WE WILL NOTE IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE TO OFFER
SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT, CITING THE ONGOING JUDICIAL PROCESS AS A
REASON. WE ARE PREPARED TO MAKE AVAILABLE TO THE MEDIA A BACKGROUND
PAPER ON TRIAL BY JURY AND THE PROCESS OF APPEAL
IN THE U.S. COURT SYSTEM. THUS FAR, RUMOR THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS
HAD PASSED THE WORD THAT THERE WILL BE NO OFFICIAL COMMENT ON THE
CASE SEEMS TO BE TRUE. NONETHELESS WE EXPECT THE MEDIA TO CONTINUE
HAMMERING AT US, ESPECIALLY ON "THE THEMES OF DISCRIMINATION
AND THE DISPARITY BETWEEN "PREACHINGS AND PRACTICE" IN THE U.S.
DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NURSES, PRESS COMMENTS, COURT DECISIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 15-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MANILA10932
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770252-0490
Format: TEL
From: MANILA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770753/aaaabtwn.tel
Line Count: 110
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f74bc06a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 MANILA 9976, 77 MANILA 12217
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1850196
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO NURSES' CONVICTION
TAGS: PINT, PINS, RP, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f74bc06a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009